

1Interviewee: Jean Aoki

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3Location: Office of theThe League of Women Voters of Hawaii, 49 South Hotel Street, Room 314

4Honolulu, HI 96813 tel: (808) 531-7448 / fax: (808) 599-5669

5voters@LWV-Hawaii.com email: www.lwv-hawaii.com

6Project: Island Movers & Shakers of the 20th Century

7Interview Team: Carol Bain, Rhea Palma

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9[0:00:12.3] Snap

10RP: Good morning, Jean. Thank you for being here.

11JA: Good morning. Well, I hope I can be of some value.

12RP: Well, we can start with your first name, and perhaps, you can tell us what year you were born, and
13where you were born.

14JA: My name is Jean Yoshie Aoki. And that's legal, I just had it legalized, my Jean. Because, you know,
15during the elementary school, the teachers gave you an English name because they couldn't pronounce
16our Japanese names. So, I just had it legalized, can you imagine. And I was born in Puunene, Maui. And
17stayed there until I graduated from high school. Came down here . . .

18RP: What year were you born?

19JA: I was born in 1926, which makes me 84 years old.

20RP: You say Puunene, so was your family in the mill, in the plantation . . .

21JA: That's right, yeah. I was brought up in the plantation camp.

22RP: What was the name of the camp?

23JA: Puunene.

24RP: What did your father do, or your parents. .

25JA: He was a carpenter. My father was a carpenter. He built houses, and also in his spare time he built
26furniture. Well, he used to do a lot of cabinetwork for the plantation. So, a very handy man [laughs].

27RP: And your mother?

28JA: My mother stayed at home, you know, there were seven children. So, she was very busy.

29RP: Were your earlier years, your school years, on Maui?

30JA: On Maui. I went to Puunene School, which was . . . kindergarten through eighth grade, and then we
31went to high school for four years.

32RP: Well, you're very active in government and politics now, were you like that as a youngster or in
33high school?

34JA: Uh, not really. In high school I was interested in so many things, sports, and I was . . . used to swim
35as a youngster, a lot. And I joined the three-year swimming club, not that I was that good but I enjoyed it
36with Coach [?] Sakamoto. And even came to Honolulu, you know, for a swimming meet. But yeah, I did
37a lot of—what you call it? Sports events. Not particularly strong but I enjoyed it.

38RP: It was swimming primarily?

39JA: Swimming. One year I would join the archery club, and I used to love to go camping. I was a Girl
40Scout and so every summer we would go camping in the West Maui Mountains. Beautiful, beautiful
41places, yeah. Except for the mosquitoes!

42RP: So, how did you get from Maui to Honolulu?

43JA: Well, right after high school, I went to the University of Hawai'i, and so there I was interested in
44journalism, too. I really wanted to make that my career. I worked on the high school newspaper in y
45senior year, and worked on the paper at the university. In fact, I was, I became the women's sports editor.
46But then, this was the war years, and so all our men editors would leave. You know, as soon as they
47came in, they'd leave for the Army. And so I finally had to take over as sports editor, which was not my
48first choice but they needed someone. And I thought maybe I could make journalism my career.
49However, you had to go to the mainland for school and my family was in no position to send me to the

50mainland, and if I went there I'd have to stay there and not come back for a while. But within the war, it
51was just too hard. So, anyway, the opportunities weren't there at that time for women and for minorities.
52So, I became a teacher.

53RP: You became a teacher, and this was also at UH.

54JA: Yes, I went to the College of Education, graduated there at fifth year. I worked for 22 and a half
55years, that's all, because at the end of it I was so ill with low blood pressure and I had arthritis. So, I had
56to take early retirement.

57RP: What did you teach? High school?

58JA: No, fifth grade. I chose fifth grade. I'm one of those people, you know, jack-of-all-trades and
59master of none. I did not want to confine my work to one subject matter. I enjoyed teaching everything,
60and so elementary school was the best for that.

61RP: That's what I hear.

62JA: Yeah, I enjoyed it.

63RP: That's great. At what school did you teach?

64JA: I began one semester at Royal School when I was just fresh out of school. Then I went to eight
65years at Kapalama School in Kalihi, and it was a English Standard school just beginning to phase out the
66English Standard. And then to Aina Haina School where I retired from there. It was an interesting . . .

67RP: You've lived then, lived and worked most of your life on O'ahu, it sounds like.

68JA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. So, I went to school, to a high school on Maui, then came to Honolulu and this
69has been my home right through.

70RP: When did your interest in government—

71JA: Well, I've always been at the university. I used to take night courses in, say, the United Nations,
72things like that. And its not part of my curriculum for education, but I did enjoy, you know, government.
73And so, when I was ill already, low pressure, really, really low so you couldn't even get up without
74fainting, but gradually improved a little, but not much. But then it came to a point where I could go,
75because I could drive, because as long as I was seated I was fine (except you get too tired). I had to wear
76dark glasses, the sun was bad. Then somebody invited me to a League of Women Voters meeting at
77Hawai'i Kai at the library.

78RP: Do you know about what year?

79JA: That was in '70s, I would think the late '70s. Maybe '77, '78. And luckily, the subject matter at that
80time was initiative and referendum. And you know, believe me, I didn't know anything about initiative
81and referendum. I know what "initiative" means; I know what "referendum" means. But put together
82the thing . . . that people can actually try to pass laws, introduce legislation for other voters to decide
83whether or not they want to pass it or not. Well, that was a new concept! Here I was a schoolteacher and
84that concept never entered my, uh, never came across it. Of course, I'm teaching at a fifth grade level.
85But that fascinated me! And so immediately, I joined the League of Women Voters. And I've been here
86ever since.

87RP: You didn't just join, though; you became extremely active. Can you tell me about that?

88JA: Well, you know, as soon as I joined they'd say, you know, what committee would you like to work
89on? So I put "education," because after all, you know, that was my background. They had what they
90called the Schools Committee, so immediately started working on that, getting speakers for just a kind of
91unit meetings that I went to first. And then I remember, they said OK, we're going to just work on whom
92and how policies, the education policies, are introduced, how they are adopted. And I was asked to do
93how the union contribution is to the policies to the schools, because I had been on the first Board, oh,
94how you call that? Hawai'i State Teachers Association. In 1968, when the Constitutional Convention
95met? They adopted, it was a constitutional addition to the Constitution to give public workers
96negotiation rights. We call it bargaining rights. And therefore, in 1970 what was the Hawai'i Education
97Association, excuse me, Professional Association, had to change. HEA included principals, university
98people, everyone, and everyone in the education field. However, when you unionized, you had to do it

99by teachers, principals, you know, different classes of educational workers. And so I was . . . elected to
100the first board of the Hawai'i State Teachers Association.

101RP: So, you were involved in the union.

102JA: I was involved in the union from the very beginning, voting on strikes, and you know, doing all the,
103having . . . I was on the board, so when the HEA team was bargaining for a contract, I remember very
104clearly they just couldn't come to an agreement and our negotiation team insisted the management was
105not really serious about negotiating. And so, we said OK we will give you until 6 o'clock that afternoon
106and if they do not, you do not come to agreement, then we're going on strike. And so all the board
107members after school had to converge at the HEA headquarters. Come 6 o'clock our negotiation team
108says give us a little more time, I think we're getting closer. So, he says OK, we'll give you until 8
109o'clock. 8 o'clock comes, give us more time! And it went on and on until midnight! And then our
110troops—you know the people in the field—they're getting all the signs, ready to go on strike. And they're
111getting all antsy, once you come to that point, you want to go! But our negotiation team says, just give
112us more time, give us more time. Until the morning, about 6 o'clock, I think, they came to an
113agreement, and then so we had to call back all the troops, you then. But then they gave us a day off,
114after all we'd been up all night, you know, all the troops, too. They were ready to march, you know, in
115what you call that?

116RP: Picket lines, they were ready to start their picket lines.

117JA: Picket lines! Picketing. That was so long ago I can't even remember. But that was . . .

118RP: Exciting!

119JA: Exciting times but tiring. And then we did go on strike once. And I was working at the office
120fielding all kinds of complaints and whatever. It was exciting days.

121RP: A lot of negotiation, a lot of research, to be able to come to agreement.

122JA: Oh yes! But we had Joan Husted, if you know who she is, she was the . . . I think she retired as the
123Executive Director . . . of HSTA. Just, oh, maybe two years ago. But she was good!

124[14:08.6]

125CB: That brings us to mentors. I know you knew the Saunders, but in your formative years, did you
126have any mentors?

127JA: At the League, I began with Honolulu League, and not immediately, but Astrid Monson, of course,
128Astrid Monson was, she was the Planning and Zoning Chair for Honolulu League. And believe me! She
129knew plenty planning and zoning! That was her profession. And she had done that kind of work all over
130the world, actually. She didn't just stay on the mainland, or just come to Hawai'i, but she had retired I
131believe at the time she got here. And so she was our . . . not only in planning and zoning, transportation,
132anything that came up that interested her. When she worked on it, it was heart and soul. She did a lot of
133research, she did a lot of figuring, even taxation, you know, she got interested in taxation. And she was
134marvelous! She did work on all kinds of commissions, committees, temporary committees for a certain
135purpose, and she did her homework. She was somebody I really admired! Oh, there were so many. Of
136course, Marion Saunders. She was terrific, you know, in education. And when she wasn't well anymore,
137then Mary Anne Raywid came, and she was a professor, world-renown. And so she took her place and
138we lost her about a year ago. There were so many . . . Martha Black in environment, and uh . . .

139RP: And then there's yourself.

140JA: Oh yes, and I have to mention Ann Feder Lee. She wrote that book on the Constitution on the
141State of Hawai'i (*a reference guide*). And it is called, the what? Reader's Guide . . . no. Anyway, it's my
142bible!

143RP: It's your bible.

144JA: I . . . you cannot really understand the constitution, it's no fun reading the constitution. But with her
145book, she puts in every passage from the constitution. And then one passage, and then she would explain
146the history of that passage, what it meant, how it has changed through the years, you know, everything.
147It's fascinating reading! And you really get to know the constitution. And I would advise it for

148everyone.

149RP: You became very well read in the state constitution.

150JA: You have to because [laughs], you know, we do a lot of . . . I was a legislative liaison for years with
151League of Women Voters of Hawai'i.

152RP: Tell me what that . . . define that.

153JA: Well, we have committees, the environment committee for example. We take care of environmental
154legislation. We have education committee that takes care of education. You know, we have groups like
155that. However, mine was mostly what we call "good government" legislation. Open government, ethics,
156campaign finance, elections, what else? What do you call . . . privacy. You know, that kind of thing. And
157I ventured into even things like Social Security and taxes sometimes when we needed to. For example,
158estate tax. They wanted to do away with it completely, so I went there and I just opposed it. That kind of
159thing, so because I don't have the background, of course, I have to do a lot of reading, catching up,
160finding out about it. So, that's why I say "Jack of all trades, master of none." [laughs]

161RP: But you really enjoyed being a legislative monitor.

162[0:18:47.0]

163JA: Yes, I really enjoyed it. It was rough at times because we covered so many bills, so many areas. And
164one day, I would say, "O-my-gosh, I have to write eight testimonies." Not enough time to do, you know.
165Luckily, some were quite simple. But then, see, in the beginning what they do is introduce bills, not one
166small topic. In elections, they would have many bills, and then as they progress, then the committees
167would put them together into one bill or two bills, which makes it easier. But it was really rough. The
168thing I enjoyed, one of the things that we did I know that helped the community, we were very interested
169in getting people to really get involved, not just in voting, but taking an interest in what the legislature
170does, what the governor does, so that they are more informed on different issues. And so, when 'Olelo
171... offered to have a two-year pilot to tape the legislative proceedings, for two years they would do all
172the expenses, and use their professional staff and all, and they did it for two years. And for the first time
173people could in their homes watch some of the proceedings. Not all, you know, but some of the
174proceedings. And many people enjoyed that. And then also at the same time, the League of Women
175Voters and Evelyn Bender, who was president at that time, and Common Cause, AAUW (American
176Association of University Women), and there was another group, Catholic Charities, it was a Catholic
177group, four groups got together and started the Access Room. They got a room in the basement, a small
178one, and volunteers would go there, and they had computers there. And they would show people how to
179write testimony, how to watch the proceedings, what to do, educate them. And they called that the
180Access Room. Then finally, they progressed to a point where the legislature actually gave them a better
181room with more equipment and with paid people, paid staff, one, I believe it was, we still had a lot of
182volunteers. But then there came a money crunch, and at that time they wanted to do away with the
183Access Room, they wanted to do away with the . . . oh! By that time, the legislature, after the two years,
184took over.

185RP: So we're talking about now the . . .

186JA: The televising of the legislative proceedings.

187RP: That was like in the late '80s? I'm trying to recall.

188JA: It was in the '80s probably, yeah. But then, Larry Meacham was in Common Cause, and I was with
189League, and there were so many groups that really enjoyed Access Room and the proceedings. We
190fought for that! Oh, we fought for it! And we managed to save the two programs. Access Room then
191became a part of the legislature itself, you know. They funded them all. So, it was very exciting times!

192CB: That's why I was going to say, this may sound really simple but you do some testimony, why is that
193important?

194JA: You know, very often, I sit in the hearing rooms and I hear everybody testifying on different issues.
195Very often the committee will say, "Nobody is interested, nobody is testifying," and they just kill it.

196Nobody's interested, unless it's something they really want. And so it's important that people will show

197an interest. And many of the things that I testified on all these years—ethics, even elections, even
198campaign finance—lately there's more interest but for a long time we were about the only ones, with
199Common Cause, Larry Meacham, we were about the only ones except for ethics, of course, Dan
200Molway [?] who was the executive director then, always showed up. And the head of the campaign
201finance, (Robert) Watada, for instance, did show up, and Dwayne Yoshina from elections. But other
202than that, there was no public there. And Dan Murray always used to say it makes a difference if only
203they testify, the heads of these departments, you know, that's expected. But the public isn't showing
204interest. And so they appreciated our being there to testify.

205[0:24:28.2]

206CB: Thank you for that. I think that, well, I think that was the other thing . . . because I've known you a
207long time, and I see how many hours you put in. What we're trying to get at what this project is . . .
208clearly you've had health issues, you overcame those . . . what is motivating, what is it that motivates
209you?

210JA: Well, I think . . . because that in the beginning, when we started, there weren't very many groups, I
211told you, on these "good government" issues. And so I felt that oh, the League had to be there! Common
212Cause and League. And we wanted to expand the people who would take an interest in these things,
213because these are important for democracy. And I think, especially during the legislative session, it was
214a full-time job, you know? Not only full-time, homework, too, you know. But I thought it was so
215important and I believed in League, that's one thing, I had faith in being appreciated but League, not me,
216you know, the whole League was doing in the different islands . . . I know Kaua'i was very active. And
217so it was a belief that we could. Without our efforts democracy would die. And there were moments,
218years, where the legislature really cooperated and we got all kinds of bills passed, we were so happy.
219And then there were years, they just wouldn't listen to anything, you know. And I remember writing for
220our Ka Leo Hana, of the closing door because it was being closed on us. It was difficult, but you had to
221keep trying, otherwise, democracy dies. At this point, we are a member of a coalition, Common Cause,
222and all that, and we really believed that we are losing democracy.

223 You think of all the things that are happening, where we are losing control. Right now, you know, with
224the Citizens United case where they said independent committees could use all the money they wanted
225without even disclosing who contributed, and these are independent committees, not associated with any
226candidates. They can spend any . . . and right up to Election Day. And this year, you found that.
227Swamped with advertisement. On the mainland it just . . . everybody was so relieved when election was
228over, they said, oh, we don't have to watch those ads anymore! And so many of them are so negative.
229When you don't have to disclose who is contributing money toward that ad, who is sponsoring the ad,
230you know, they can become very negative. Whereas, if you had to say, you know, if a rich person said I
231had to pay for the ad, I'm paying for this ad, he's going to be a big careful. But now, we're afraid . . . that
232even in financial matters in the economy, the middle class is disappearing. The gap between the rich and
233the rest of us is growing. We're going to lose the middle class. And when we lose the middle class, there
234goes democracy. But even right now it's the powerful, it's the rich that are really having more say on
235more federal policies than we are. Unless, we really combine together and forget those ads and really
236study the candidates and vote together, vote for the good ones. Not just those who spend the most
237money. So when they equated money with freedom of speech, free speech, how can you equate the
238two? In other words, those of us without money, have no speech, whispers, we're not speaking really out
239loud. Of course, they say that sometimes not having any regulations, here at least we regulate the
240amount of money that we can donate to candidates directly. But even that's going to be lifted if we're
241not careful.

242And unless you have some kind of regulation, really, the common person, you know, the everyday
243citizen, is losing ground. We have no . . . we can't even try to help the candidates we want, not with the
244kind of money that's available to them from special interests.

245[0:30:07]

246RP: That sounds like ... I was going to ask, you retired in 2010 as a legislative liaison?

247JA: Yes, but we haven't been able to ... nobody has, you know.

248RP: Found a successor?

249JA: I tried to ... I don't know what's going to happen. I'm willing to help anyone...

250Joanne is the... she worked with me for two years.

251RP: Joanne? She's in the League?

252JA: Uh, JoAnn Muraoka, yes. She's ... (I'm blank, its lack of sleep) but anyway, she can't, she has
253other obligations and all that, so she can't just take over ... so we need people. I mean, two or three
254people, you know. I'd be willing to help them in the beginning.

255RP: As you leave that, sort of, behind you, that issue about the disparity between the changing, the loss
256of the middle class, that is one of your main concerns?

257JA: That is a very main concern.

258RP: And that is an issue that you want ...

259JA: We're going to work on that. And the Coalition, too, we're also working. You know, we had the
260Census? And then next year, May or something, we're going to have a reapportionment commission,
261and from what I notice ten years ago, there was, there is. Here, we have a commission. In many states
262the legislature directly decides how they are going to decide on the district lines. You know, redistricting,
263because the population moved, or population increase, or decreased, and their districts are going to
264change. And they decide. And by, because each one really wants to select his own people, the ones that
265have been electing you to office all the time, you don't want to lose them, you know? And have all new
266constituents? And so they get involved in it. Although we do have a commission, they are elected, they
267are appointed by the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, you know, two each, I think, and
268from the minority caucuses two each, eight of them are appointed by legislators. And then they pick the
269ninth person who will be the Chair. But in observing them last year, we found a lot of ... I can't even
270think of the word right now ... you know, where they draw lines

271CB: Reapportionment?

272JA: No. They gerrymander, gerrymandering ... and they try to draw lines in trying to keep districts that
273they want ... voters that they want as constituents. So instead of just honestly changing the district lines
274so that they're more or less, you can have a square or rectangle. Not going all over the place. And last
275time they tried something, one senator, somebody saw that. And he was only there for a few hours, I
276understand. But one of the districts was so distorted, it just meandered all over the place. And so, at the
277next commission meeting, you know, Common Cause testified, I did too. I wrote some blistering
278testimony for that! And I understand that disappeared because people realized, somebody found out. And
279so immediately, they changed it. But see, if there had been nobody watching ...

280RP: So you made a big difference there.

281JA: That senator would have disappeared. I mean, his district. So things like that happen and that's why
282what we want really is to change the appointing authorities, we call them, instead of having the Senate
283appoint two, and the House, you know, leadership appoint two, and the minority caucuses appointing
284two each, we would like to see, well, we can't decide how we want to do it, but there must be a way of
285trying to get not just the appointing of people they want, there must be a process, we think, where we—
286people who are really interested from the public can apply to be on it. And some of them should be
287considered so we can have a mix, you know. And that's what we want to work on was truly for an
288amendment to the constitution, so we have to just find some one of trying to get some public, people
289really representing the public, on that commission.

290CB: When you find the barrier, Jean, you're trying to find the proper way, and if that doesn't work, try
291another way. That's one of the things we're noticing about movers and shakers is that if they see a
292barrier, that's a no stop. You're going to find a way around and you're going to be creative and ...

293JA: But if we have enough groups interested in it, then we will succeed, you know. And that's what
294we're trying to do. And then, one last thing, Social Security. I told you about the commission that is

295coming up and by December [2010], they will come up and they sent out ... Actually the name of the
296commission is more looking at, what is the name of the commission? This is important.

297[0:36:56.9, JA requests a break]

298RP: So we're talking about Social Security?

299JA: Did you want to talk about other questions?

300CB: Whichever you want to do.

301JA: Maybe we should end with Social Security, it's going to get ...

302RP: In listening to you talk about your formative years, in growing aware of the legislature, government,
303and during that time you were working with the League, the State League, it sounded like as you were
304growing more aware and seeing more of the League's possible role in exposing government, that [RP
305requests do over]

306RP: I notice that when you were telling me about your involvement, growing involvement in the League
307that it sounds like you were very much responsible, or at least involved for a time in the League's role in
308creating more open government. Were you responsible . . .

309JA: I don't know how much I was responsible for, but let me tell you. The reason I got involved with the
310legislature is, I was with Honolulu League at that time. And Arlene Ellis was the president, and she
311asked me to go to some meeting, some committee that had been formed. That's when 'Olelo had already
312had the two-year trial period of taping all the proceedings, some of the proceedings of the legislature,
313and were evaluating it, ready to recommend that the legislature adopt the program themselves, and pay
314for it. And so this committee, I was on this committee, and we decided that it was a very worthwhile
315program, and we had recommendations and how they might select the proceedings that they, you know,
316for airing, because they couldn't cover everything. And so when the State had their one people testifying
317in the legislature, I asked the president of State League at that time, Jim Kochi, I asked him if I could go
318and testify on that one bill that would have legislature adopt the program. And so that's how it began, I
319went there. And then I noticed for example that at one time, Evelyn Bender was the president then, I
320believe, they were strictly testifying only on arms control. Not arms control, we don't call it arms
321control. Here, what do you call it?

322RP: Handgun control, or something.

323JA: In our community, not nationally. And those were the bills she was covering. So I said, Evelyn
324(Bender), how do I get more experiencing in testifying, because I had started on the other. She said,
325Jean, just go especially to the Judiciary Committee meetings. Those were held at night in those days
326because we were at—the State Capitol was being renovated—and so we were meeting in the office tower,
327you know. The rooms were all vertical, in other words, you covered so many floors and it was difficult
328going up and down. And they didn't have as many conference rooms. And so, the Judiciary Committee
329always met in the evenings. So I would go there in the evening, just sit there and listen. And when
330something interested me, I would ask ... if I could testify on that, you know, and I did. But that's how it
331started. And then when I took over as I told you, my curious mind [laughs], I felt that good government,
332you know because National [League] itself. Remember we had this "Making Democracy Grow" or some
333such initiative, and so I felt, well, if all those things are part of making democracy grow and be firm, and
334so I would just—it's because I knew, of course, we were guided by our position. If you don't have any
335position on those things we don't testify. But we do have them, you know. And so it started, and I told
336you in those days it was Larry Meacham and myself. Other groups would get involved when it came to
337Access Room and things like that, but for campaign spending, ethics, elections ... we had a few others.
338Richard Port of the Democratic Party used to join us.

339[43:19.6]

340RP: And that's how it started. Carol, you had a question . . .

341CB: Well, I was going to ask two things. One is you mentioned positions. How does the League do what
342they call positions? And then, after that I wanted you to ... you did a project about Judicial Review and
343maybe ...

344JA: Independence, right. We had ... the legislators also comment on this. They appreciate the League
345does study on issues before we testify on them. They know that we are not just making overnight
346decisions to follow a certain legislation. And so, it's a long process actually.

347 In fact, someone called me one day and we spent all afternoon talking about it. She wanted to
348introduce a certain study. At our December planning meeting [of the League] at the local levels, they
349bring up subjects that they're interested in. Studies that they think we might be doing or even giving the
350leadership recommendations on where they should become more active in. You know, that kind of thing.
351And then, the local Leagues then decide which they will recommend to the State League. And so when
352the State Board meets, they take their recommendations, and they're planning for—we have a biennial
353convention, State convention every two years, we have that. And so at that time, the State Board decides
354which studies they would recommend, which actions they would recommend. But they all go, get into
355the booklet, the convention booklet as recommended items or unrecommended items. But at the
356convention, if the people are interested, they can select an unrecommended item for study with a two-
357thirds vote, you know. And so that's how. They only study it, and it takes a year or two. Generally we
358have a committee that gathers all the information. Several years ... I've come out with a report, a
359booklet, which is sent to all the members, they study it, and then we have what we call consensus
360meetings, where they come and discuss, and you know, and we come to a consensus. "And that's when
361you vote," [referring to the caller]. No, you don't vote necessarily. By the debate, by the questions asked,
362you know more or less how the group feels. So, if I were the leader I would say, well, it seems that we
363have a consensus for this or against this. And if anyone disagrees, they would disagree, and discuss, but
364if it is a matter of three people and there are 60 people there, well, you know, it's passed. But you don't
365necessarily count. We want more than a majority. If there were half a dozen people, with good reasons
366for opposing it, then you know, we would say no consensus.

367 But then after that the position—they write the position statement—then we put it in our position book.
368It's an involved process but then you feel confident, you know, for example, the anti-gambling thing that
369came, after reading all that and getting the consensus from the membership, you can testify with
370confidently, you that you're right. At least we think we're right. [laughs].

371CB: So, I recall you did a project about Judicial Independence and if you could give us an overview of
372that project and maybe if there are barriers ...

373JA: Well, that's ... when I was president, and this was when we were, remember that ballot issue, that
374marriage amendment, and the Con-Con at the same time? We were very involved in that. But you know,
375in the Constitutional Convention thing, what happened was, the vote was in, they misunderstood what
376the vote meant, but actually no votes must be counted as yes votes, that sort of thing. It has to be 50
377percent, at least 50 percent of all those going to the polls that day must vote yes on it. Anyway, so it
378went to the courts, right? And they were talking about the district court, and the circuit court, and there
379are federal district courts, and federal, you know, circuit courts. I was thoroughly confused! I said we
380have to study the Judiciary. Anyway, that's the third branch of government, how can we be, me, I be so
381ignorant about it, you know. And so, the day I stepped down as president ...

382RP: And that was ...

383(0:49:12.8]

384JA: ... at our convention, I proposed that we have a Judiciary study. And with us, as long as somebody
385is willing to chair it, generally, you get it. So, I had to chair it! [laughs] But then next year, fumbling
386around how best to study this, you know ... I had a committee of people willing, but how do we go
387about doing it? Then we got a call from the main, our liaison, you know, from the mainland for the
388federal government. Why don't we apply for a grant, because luckily the national League had gotten
389some money from the Open Society group, money for a study on judicial independence? And that's
390related to the Judiciary. And so we applied, but we had to get partners for this and so we got the
391American Bar Association the American Judicature Society, the Judiciary, the law school? ACLU and
392the Media Council, and AAUW, that's right.

393Some of them kind of dropped out towards the end but we got a good group together, and with that we
394got the grant. And it was a multi-year grant, you know, for giving us some money for studying the issue.
395And therefore, we came up with a report two, maybe one or two years after that. And to print that,
396publish it, and distribute it, they gave us more money. And then we were heading for a conference on
397judicial independence. And so they gave us our money for that, and we got money from other sources,
398and then we ended up with a conference where we brought in three people from the mainland
399knowledgeable on judicial independence, you know, judges, etc. And then we got our Attorney General,
400we got all our other people here, knowledgeable people here involved. And we had a terrific panel. We
401had three panels, separately throughout the day. We taped it at 'Olelo and showed it many, many times.
402The publication, the Judiciary asked us if we could give one to every judge, so we did that. And we gave
403to every legislator, we, you know, different groups asked for it. Whatever we had, we gave to them. So,
404it was well distributed.

405CB: Around 2004, was it?

406RP: Ah yes, around then. And so, what I regret—and then because of that we were asked, I was asked,
407Jackie did sit on some, and Joe Jude, on different committees because in the legal community, you
408know, where some work in bar associations, American Judicature Society, whatever. For their
409committees they actually have study committees, they like to have somebody, some lay people, and from
410established groups like the League, so they would ask us to send somebody there. And so we got
411involved in that. And I was asked to sit on the board of the American Judicature Society, so I did until,
412you know, I was really tied up toward the end. Busy, busy, and not too well So, I resigned from it,
413but ...

414CB: And that would be the board that actually reviews and selects judges?

415JA: No. That's a separate within the Judiciary, that's a commission. The American Judicature Society is
416made up mostly of judges, but then they have lay people, they have other attorneys on it. But it's mostly
417for them.

418[0:53:42.0]

419 So we got on good terms with all these many different groups, and to this day the university law
420school helps us in so many things. You know, even Dean (Richardson School of Law) Avi Soifer is so
421willing to help us moderate different forums, etc. And to work with us. In fact, he worked with us on the
422Con-Con. That was another big study that we did. And we had three separate events to present to the
423people because we weren't taking a position on Con-Con we could go ahead and try to educate everyone
424on the different things. We had a conference where we brought in a scholar, State constitutional scholar.
425And then we had a debate ... on KGMB, "Pro-Con." And then we had 'Olelo taping four forums for us,
426for example, what are the risks, our question was, what are the risks, the advantages, the possibilities ...
427for example, in the environment. If we had a Con-Con (Constitutional Convention), what are the risks to
428the environment of the community? What are the possibilities ... what benefits can you get from a
429convention? And we had Native Hawaiian group for one panel, environmental group for one other panel,
430and what was the other? There was a business group. This we did together with Hawai'i ...HIPA,
431Hawai'i Institute of Public Affairs, right. And so we had three separate huge programs, we slept, ate
432[laughs], working, bit our fingers, we were elated when people would say yes! So down spirited when
433we couldn't get enough people, you know, on a certain panel. But we managed to do all successfully.

434RP: You had started to say something about a little bit of disappointed about ...

435JA: Oh! What I ... I wish I had been younger when I started the judiciary thing because they have so
436many things I think we as a lay group can explore. Not through the eyes of the judiciary, but through the
437eyes of the public. How easy it is to get access to the judiciary, for example, you know. What are the
438costs to the average person? Do you need a lawyer and all that. How accessible is it? Are the judges, not
439the judges, the bar association, for example, I know they do have that Legal Aid Society and all that, but
440even for, not even for the impoverished but for even the average person it's scary sometimes, going
441through the courts. So how much help is there? I'd like to do a study of that. And the jury system. Right

442now, you notice that, have you ever been called for jury duty? And how you have to call, keep calling in
443and they keep saying, no, call back again? And they have very few jury trials because they're all—while
444awaiting trial, they're also trying to get to some understanding and they solve the cases themselves.
445Which is a good thing, however, how much are people being forced into it? You know, I don't know.
446And maybe you'd do better if you go to trial. But so are the things I would love to explore, but I can't
447any more. And so in our study we had discussed certain things we would like to go into, look into, but
448Jackie Parnell was with me, but she's gone. And Jo Judy has gone to another island, you know. And
449those are the three most active ones. So, regret for that's why I say I really regret that. 'Cause that's an
450area that really needs exploring, I think.

451[0:58:46.3]

452RP: Is State League involved in any way in trying to generate a new generation of ...

453JA: Well, there has to be someone really interested, and I would love to see somebody, even if it's a
454retired attorney you find, you know? If she could divorce herself from you know, the Judiciary and all
455that and think of it as a public person. Yeah, that's an idea to explore!

456RP: Maybe someone will hear your message.

457JA: [laughs] Well, hopefully, yes.

458RP: I was going to say, before you wanted to get into your topic. Is there anything, any questions we
459didn't ask, things that you think should be recorded today? Any other issues, events, or highlights in
460your life? Carol, did you have any questions?

461CB: I didn't hear about any ... you said there were seven siblings. But was there anyone in your
462formative years that was a mentor, was there a teacher, or ...

463JA: You know, we were far apart, I mean we were not ... we were at least three years apart in age. And
464somehow, we were close but when you're growing up, somebody three years your senior ...

465CB: But what we notice about you Jean is that you'll see something, say, the judiciary, or soon you'll
466talk about Social Security, that you see a problem, you approach it to solve it. Why is it you think you
467can do that?

468RP: It sounds like you grew up very independent, even in a large family.

469JA: I was very independent. I was one of those ... I would sneak into the closet to read, so I don't have
470to do housework, you know.

471RP: You did your own thing and you were self-reliant.

472JA: [laughs] You know I had been asked ... I had enough sisters that they allowed me to do that. Or go
473wandering off somewhere. I was very independent.

474RP: So that independence sounds like it served you well, and a little bit of competition because you
475liked sports.

476JA: Yeah. And I, for example, during the war years, Fridays was a workday for us. We were going to
477high school, but Friday and Saturday you had to work. And we had to work in the fields at one time,
478hoeing weeds. But then I got sick, pleurisy or something, and so I had to ...

479They sent me to Kress Store to work, and the floor worker couldn't stand me. She said I'm too
480independent. Well, I was doing my work, helping the customers, you know. So I don't know why she
481said that.

482CB: I bet you argued.

483JA: No, I don't argue. I don't know. Maybe I wasn't depending on her too much, I don't know.

484I really don't know what she meant.

485CB: You didn't need her.

486JA: You know, you have to keep busy, right? You have to keep busy at Kress Store, even if no
487customers, you're not going to stand there doing nothing, so you would dust things. So, you know we
488used to save string, tie knots and make balls out of them. So I would do that. Then there's nothing to do
489already, I would unwind it all underneath, and then publicly [motions winding string and laughs]. But
490I'm not a good salesperson.

491RP: You are a good salesperson because you ...

492JA: When it comes to money I can't sell things. I'm the type who don't want to ask you for money.

493RP: When it comes to information that's important to people, you're a good salesman.

4941:02:52.3]

495JA: But go back to, come to Social Security. You know because we are in such dire straights financially, 496on the day I talked about it, that our [United States] debt was 13 trillion 679 billion 796 million dollars 497plus. And this is increasing at 4.6 billion dollars every single day. OK? So we are in a bad shape. And so 498President Obama really wanted Congress to set up a commission to work on this. Not just on Social 499Security. But in answer he created the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility— they're suppose 500to study everything, the debt, the deficit, and what's causing it, and how we can try to correct that.

501 And they're always eyeing—I don't care who is talking about our debt— the entitlements are costing 502too much. They forget that Social Security has a fund of its own, has its own tax source, you know, the 503FICA tax. OK? And our workers and their employers are paying today more money than really Social 504Security needs for its beneficiaries for that year. Since 1984, they have been paying much, much more 505every month, taken from their paycheck, and you remember, that the people at the lowest rung of the 506income ladder pay FICA tax on 100 percent of their pay. Whereas, somebody earning a million dollars a 507year, was paying less than 10 percent of his pay of the FICA tax. And that together they were putting so 508much money in there that if we hadn't had this recession, we would have about ... five trillion dollars in 509there. But you know, things got bad. People were not making as much money as before, or they were not 510making more money. Less people are working. We have in there slightly over 2.5 trillion dollars that our 511workers and their employers paid in over and above what was needed. They're suppose to be in trust 512fund, but of course, all you find there are IOU's, the treasury. Because all that money was then used to 513pay the operating expenses of our nation, and also to give pay cuts, especially to the rich. See, because 514there was so much surplus, George W. Bush said we have all this surplus, this should go back to the 515people, tax payers.

516Because so much of it was FICA tax surplus, the thing to do would have been to give them a holiday and 517say, OK, November and December we don't have to pay the FICA tax. Or something like that. But no, 518they gave it to the rich, the other tax cuts, and they spent it. And today, they're saying the money is gone. 519You can't use the same money twice, it's gone.

520 Now, if you say it's gone, and they're going to try to raise the retirement age to 70, and to maybe 521lower the beginning amounts that you get, and maybe do away with the yearly raise that we get because 522of inflation ... then they try to cut down all that. Now when that happens, if you do that, that means the 523same people who paid that extra money, now its time to get their money back, have to wait longer. I 524mean, why should they be the ones to be penalized? The extra money benefited everybody, the whole 525population, everybody, even those who don't pay the FICA tax because remember, only earned income 526is taxed. Capital gains, investment income are not subject to the FICA tax. And so, and yet everybody 527benefitted from it, right? And so why should only the people who paid into it have to repay what people, 528I mean, the government borrowed? Everybody should pay back. And that's my concern, that they will 529only then penalize the people who were good enough to pay the surplus. And that is something we have 530to stop because of just fairness, you know, calls for that.

531[1:08:39.3]

532 And so now, this trust fund in December [2010], this commission is going to come up with the idea of, 533okay, how shall we fix it? How are we going to do away with that debt? I'll be interested to find out 534what they come up with. I was listening to a program last night, that Chris Matthews, he was 535interviewing a Republican and a Democrat. And yet they all seemed to agree on this. This commission 536that was created does not have the mandate, as I said to, for Congress to just vote it up or down. No 537amendments. This one does allow for amendments by Congress, and yet the three talking agreed that no, 538it should be a mandate for up and down vote, no amendments. How can they say that? Of course, we 539don't know what the recommendation will be. So now our concern is, will there be enough time between

540their publishing their report and Congress voting on it, that the public will know exactly what's in it and
541we can voice our concerns, you know? Our opposition, our support. That's crucial. And that's something
542that we have to let our legislators know, that we ... want to be part of this agreement or whatever they
543come up with. We must have our say. We must insist on it. And that's going to take everybody, all of the
544people in our whole nation. But how do we get that message across?

545RP: How are you personally trying to get that message across?

546JA: Only on this island right now, for instance, I talked with the Hawai'i State Retired Teachers
547Association and the board. And the Kokua Council gave us each three minutes to voice our concerns.
548And generally, they're interested in issues for elderly care or things like that to make the elderly more
549comfortable, to help them. But Social Security affects them, so I said this really affects them, and I was
550allowed to talk about this. And they agreed with me on this. So, I have to let them know what I heard,
551and then the message has to be: Give us enough time to study the bill itself ...our recommendations, and
552give us time to voice our concerns. And how do we get it to the rest of the nation? They have these call-
553in programs late at night, the Journal ... what do they call that? Ah, C-Span. But then they don't, they
554confine it to certain topics. If they were ever to come, yes, I would certainly call up. I did call up once ...

555CB: Do you write letters?

556JA: You can write letters to ah, of course, we should get it to National [League]. What are we doing?

557Ask them, what are you doing about it? You know, I certainly would do League.

558RP: National League?

559[1:12:31.4]

560JA: National League, yes. Then if they ... or even email other State Leagues. I don't have time to do all
561that.

562CB: During legislative session at other times, did you have support from your family, do they ever say,
563hey, you're spending too much time away from ...?

564JA: Nooo. Ah, sometimes, yeah, my husband would say, oh, why don't you quit ... already? But he
565doesn't really mean it, no [laughs]. It's just I don't complain, you know.

566CB: But then again ... sometimes the family says, you're not home enough to nurture us.

567JA: So right now, well, I had only had one son. And I have two grandchildren, they're both in college on
568the mainland.

569RP: Are they inspired by you in anyway?

570JA: I don't know.

571CB: Well, if there was a message for someone, your own family, or other generations, about the work
572that you're doing yourself, what would that message be?

573JA: What was that again? I'm sorry.

574CB: A message for others that may be thinking of going into this kind of work where you're monitoring
575our government, where you're being a citizen ...

576RP: Well, a good example as I was riding the bus over here this morning, and there were two young
577people, college students there, and the guy goes, "Well, did you vote last Tuesday?" and his friend said
578"No, I don't do that."

579JA: Huh!

580RP: So what would be your response?

581JA: I would keep my mouth shut when I hear that things are ...

582RP: I did, yeah.

583JA: You know, I found out that, you know, there was, we have a circle of friends that used to meet for
584lunch every month. And there's this woman, girlfriend, good friend of mine who never voted, never
585voted. And you know, I'm not about to say anything, but some of the others were very interested in this
586particular election, so every time we get together, we talk about it. And she got excited one year, "Jean,
587is it too late to register?" So, just talking about of these issues or candidates, whatever, it helps.

588RP: In a safe environment.

589JA: Even things like Social Security is very difficult to talk about to a large group. If you have, even
590about voting, a small group, say 20 people at the most, and you could talk to them, and answer their
591questions, and which ever level they want to talk about it at, you know? There is no rules about how, if
592they want to talk pidgin, you can talk pidgin, and you know, somehow to get through. But answer their
593questions honestly and all that. And I think you could get them interested. But its that access to that, how
594do you get them to come? Or you go to them, you know?

595RP: Did your friend register? Or was it too late.

596JA: Oh no, she did. She voted. I don't know if she's continuing to vote, but she voted.

597[1:16:17.7]

598CB: Well, what skills do you use most in succeeding at what you're doing? What did you find was most
599useful as far as your own skills?

600JA: You know, one thing about something like this, you cannot just suggest to people and expect them to
601do all the work. You have to do the work, they have to see that you are working hard, and they are
602willing to, you know? And then you give them, delegate things, that they will do.

603RP: So work hard yourself and set an example.

604JA: You have to, yeah. And you have to be enthused about anything, you know?

605CB: I think that's true, Jean, because when I saw how hard you worked, it means ah, I should be doing
606more. But it's not that's why you're doing it, you're doing it 'cause you want ...

607JA: No, and the thing is, one thing leads to another. I have to come to the office every day to work on
608those testimonies, 'cause you don't know what is happening, they give you 24-hour notice kind of thing.
609Ah, and because you're in the office, and phones come in, you get some how roped into doing other
610things, you know, it's just never ending. So, I'm here now. I'm suppose to be cleaning up because we
611[League] have to move, I have to throw away things, have to ...[laughs] and I can't get to it because I
612get caught up in another project.

613CB: Oh, I think that's a good place to stop.

614JA: Yes!

615RP: Thank you very, very much.

616JA: Ah, thank you! I should talk a little more calmly. I get excited about things!

617

618[1:18:29.2] Snap

619